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Unbillable hours

'Art of the Baroque form'

Dancing horses raise money for cancer center

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In 2001, about two years after receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, Patricia Artimovich decided she wanted to return to riding horses, a great love of her youth.

Artimovich, a licensed attorney who manages the contracts department at Universities Space Research Association, a Columbia nonprofit, started slowly, as she began to rebuild her strength.

"I could only ride for about 15 minutes, I was so weak," she said. "I had only peach fuzz under my helmet."

While hormonal therapies can eradicate cancer, they can also cause the onset of osteoporosis, so Artimovich said her oncologist did not think much of her returning to doing jumps on horses as she had in her 20s.

She turned instead to dressage, often referred to as horse ballet — a series of moves made by the horse with minimal direction from its rider. It's scored similarly to gymnastics, on a scale of 0 to 10, and is an Olympic event.

Artimovich says that at its highest level, dressage is an "art of the Baroque form."

Through her riding she became involved with the Potomac Valley Dressage Association, an area nonprofit. The association had a history of donating a portion of the proceeds of an event to a charitable cause, and in 2003 she approached it about doing an event for breast cancer.

A few years in, the PVDA Ride for

Life Dancing Horse Challenge, founded by Artimovich, raked in \$30,000 for the Johns Hopkins Avon Foundation Breast Center, which offers patients a full spectrum of care.

The event money is focused on the center's quality-of-life research fund, "aimed at not only helping people survive but doing it in ways that are less difficult, less mutilating," she said.

What started as a one-day event has grown into a two-day competition with more than 250 riders, including Olympians and Olympic hopefuls.

As of 2010, PVDA's event had raised \$320,000 for the center. Artimovich said she is also proud to have helped Johns Hopkins "top off" the money needed to train an oncologist every year.

This year's Ride for Life will be held at the Prince George's Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro and will include "dancing in the dirt" at the arena.

The June 25 and June 26 event's honorary chair is Ann Romney, former Massachusetts first lady and dressage gold medalist, although Artimovich said she was unsure if Romney would be able to attend because of her husband's run for president.

A black tie optional gala will be held Saturday night.

Daytime admission to the equestrian events is free. Tickets for the dancing horse challenge are \$20 and can be purchased at the door. Tickets for the gala, at \$100 a person, can be purchased at www.pvdarideforlife.org.



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Patricia Artimovich is pictured with Pikaboo, a 10-year-old Hanoverian horse, on Final Decision Farm in Howard County.